Following

(2024 posts)

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These are the posts from my blog *Following* (https://blog.10v24.net/following) released in 2024. I made two versions, PDF and EPUB.

This book is a snapshot of the blog as it was on 31 December 2024 (after releasing the last blog post of the year). "Is Heroism Virtuous?" and "Hierarchy of Virtues" are duplicated on the blog as well. (The blog duplications were an accident that I didn't notice until now, but I'm not sure which posts to delete, so I'll leave them as-is.)

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Introduction

04 July 2024

In October of 2022, I started to wind down my previous blog, *Formulalessness*. It took me until sometime this year (or maybe not even all completed), to finish wrapping things up, doing things like reviewing what I had written, summing up important ideas, and relating what I had written to outside kinds of people. Some of this writing I did on that blog, as well as on my subreddit.

Now I think it's time to start a new blog. This blog is called *Following*. It is about how terms in an argument "follow" (philosophy) and how people "follow" things (religion / ideology). My intention is to also write about whatever I feel like writing.

I am currently still taking a break from doing philosophy (at least, holding back from fully pursuing it). But when I stop taking that break, I intend to read a lot of philosophy, to help me have a better background for whatever objections might come against MSL. I will probably write some things here about that.

I've been trying to figure out my priorities at this point in my life. One thing that stands out in my mind is "maintenance". If my writing were a software project, I would have "released it" and now I should come up with bug fixes and tech support. I feel like I can begin to do that fairly easily. But, it makes me a bit wary that I might say new things in the process, because new things can extend my project into new features, bringing new bugs, even breaking old features.

Another question is, what exactly am I trying to maintain? I've decided that VMH, MSL, ethical theism, and the temptation contract theodicy are the main ideas I want to defend. So I am largely letting go of the rest of my writing, in terms of emphasis. Those things become more like ideas or suggestions that belong to my past self. But the things I keep defending are the ones that my ongoing present self says. VMH, MSL, and the theodicy are largely "philosophy of religion" topics, or that's a natural way to think of them. On first inspection, ethical theism seems not to need further

philosophical defense, and maybe VMH is close to being as defended as it needs to be. Both of those have some potential as reform agendas, VMH of religion, and ethical theism of secular altruism or activism. I guess if I were to "extend" my project rather than "defend" or "maintain" (granting that all three of those things can lead to each other), I could work on relating VMH and ethical theism to other worldviews, or to literature, current events, etc. Maybe those four topics are what are really central at this time, and likely for the long-term, rather than maintenance in itself. (I guess technically the theodicy could be part of the fuller version of MSL, like in *Formulalessness*, so it makes sense to think of my focus as VMH, MSL, and ethical theism.)

I'm not sure the status of my songwriting. I have some songs that are unreleased, that I'm unclear on whether to move forward on at this time. Maybe music is a thing to "maintain" or "defend" by putting energy into performing, explaining, or promoting it.

All of these things are relatively short (low word count). (I guess while the MSL booklet is short, it doesn't cover the fuller implementation in *Formulalessness* which is longer, and that implementation could certainly be developed more. But compared to the sacred scriptures of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, or current events, science, politics, or even other things, there's a lot less data in MSL, and from my perspective, if I have to back off from the fuller implementation of MSL to just try to defend the booklet, that's OK, at least for now.)

This fits how my brain works these days. For a long time, I've had memory issues (probably initially from early manic episodes, and quite possibly also from all the stress my brain has gone through over the last 11 years), so, issues accessing memories and holding them in my head. This gets worse with bipolar depression, but I'm never the best at holding things in my head, and now it feels a bit worse. Maybe this is all the stress catching up to me, or possibly somewhat hereditary or common aging. So I feel like the less I have to deal with, the better.

A practical benefit of having a finished project is that you can go on to implement it and promote it. But the danger of implementation and promotion is to stop searching for the truth. I don't want to get in a situation where I'm promoting things that I'm not trying to know the truth of at the same time. As my mental horizons shrink, I don't want to defend all the things I pursued when I was younger.

So I hope that I can make a workable deal with myself where I commit to upkeep on a few important ideas, and let go of the rest.

I wanted to use Google less, and also set up the posts so that they're easier to make into a book someday. So I wanted to not use Blogger like I did for *Formulalessness*. (Someday I hope to make an ebook version of *Formulalessness*.) I wanted to host this blog on my own server, so then I thought of using Wordpress. But that seems complicated and maybe I would have to update it for security reasons, and I am burned out on even minor computer chores like that. Other platforms I thought might be less likely to be maintained longterm, and also would have to be updated. So I thought of making my own minimalist "blog platform" and this is what I made. I think for the kind of people who are into my writing, it's fine. And this blog doesn't have to become popular in this form.

The main thing it lacks is a comment section. In the four or five years of *Formulalessness*, there was one really valuable comment that sticks out in my memory, which was the one about Mormonism being like MSL. Certainly I would want people to let me know about things like that, or even other things, so they can send me an email. Comment sections can allow for a kind of social interaction between commenters. I'm okay with not having that on this blog (the subreddit does have a lounge you could post to).

In *Formulalessness*, I tried to put links in the text to other posts internal to the blog. Generally, I feel like not doing that in this blog, or doing it less, to reduce actions that feel like work. I don't usually click on links in blog posts, even sometimes when they would be necessary to fully understand the posts. Things that really need to be said should therefore maybe best be spelled out in every post. At the same time, I don't think I will spell things out in every post. I want to make an ebook version of this blog every year, and maybe that's the best way to read it, if you find yourself having trouble keeping up with my internal references, since you would be reading all the posts at the same time. Also using the "search function" of this blog (or sometimes of *Formulalessness*) might work. Hopefully I can use easily searched labels for my ideas. In some cases, using the search function could expand your abilities to look up things in my post, rather than just relying on the links I've put in.

The Superhero

16 July 2024

The Superhero came back from a long series of adjudications in the court system of a far-away country, helping them to establish the rule of law there. This was something that in the long run would prevent him from having to fly over there and deal with criminals, or at least cut back on that. The adjudicating work was tedious, mentally taxing, and emotionally draining. The Superhero was not trained in law, so he had to quickly study.

He came back from this long series of adjudications exhausted and just wanted to relax in his little house on the edge of town, painted white with a hedge around the front. His hedge kept him from view and hid the wild grass and weeds in his front lawn.

But after a couple of days off, a huge fire broke out in town and the fire department called him. "Can you do that thing where you drink water from the fire hose in great drafts and then spew it on the fire? Like a couple years ago? The fire is really big and is threatening a whole section of town." The Superhero asked the fire department if they could just use fire trucks. But as in the past, the fire department was underfunded and somewhat mismanaged, so there weren't enough working trucks. "I really just wanted to take a break" said the Superhero. "Well," said the fire chief, "It's either you or the town burns."

The Superhero gathered his wits, shook off his fatigue, and drove over to the fire. He parked by the side of the street and walked over to where the fire department was gathered around the fire hydrant. He could see the flames, smell the smoke, and feel the heat, of the town burning.

They had the firehose already fitted to the hydrant, and when he had gathered his physical courage, he put the opening of the fire hose in his mouth and the firefighters opened the valve, letting water flow into him.

His stomach and ribs expanded painfully, and he grew to much more than human size. The water tasted bad, the chemical/fabric badness of the firehose. His instinct was to gag and choke from the flow of water, and his stomach wanted him to vomit, but he had to

take in the water and suppress his instincts so that at the right moment he could spew the water on the fire, aim for the right spot.

After twenty-four hours of this, he and the firefighters got the fire under control and he could go back home.

He ached from the work but reasoned "Well, if I had to do this day after day for the rest of my life, I could do it without literally going crazy." And after all, he was the Superhero. Who else was going to do what he did?

After a few days off, but before his body was feeling back to normal, he was called in the middle of the night. He really wanted to sleep, but he knew from experience that it was better to respond to these calls. "Hello? Is this the Superhero?" "Yes," he said, half-asleep. The woman on the other end said "We have a problem downtown. The Exner Building is starting to sway. We think it might be a hyperlocal earthquake. The Exner Building was not built for earthquakes." "Uhh, but because of geological change, the little earthquakes..." he muttered. "Yes, geological change, please, can you help us stabilize the building? You're the only one who can do it on short notice."

He thought for about five seconds. If the building fell down, he would have to spend all day tomorrow rebuilding it, and also explaining to people why he thought his good night's rest was more important. Ultimately it would be more work, even if he needed his sleep right now. "Oh. Okay. I'll head out there in a minute."

He went and held the building up for four hours while they got everyone and everything valuable out. And then they were able to bring in some cranes, counterweights, and temporary flying buttresses, to hold the building in place while they decided what to do with it.

He made it home an hour or two before dawn, and did his best to sleep through the morning.

A week passed. In many ways he felt better, but his attitude toward being the Superhero and doing Superheroic things was worse. He felt absolutely burned out on being the Superhero and really felt like he couldn't do that kind of work ever again. He was trying to word his "resignation letter". It was hard because he had never been formally put in the role of Superhero. There was no hiring process for him, so there was no quitting process. He was getting together

his courage to do this yet another wearying task.

Time passed. He was starting to heal from the yoke of servitude, and simply needed to formalize his decision to become free. But then on a day when he might have been working up his courage to make the fateful announcement, in the middle of the day, he got a call. Mrs. Abbot's cat had gotten out onto the fire escape of the building and couldn't make it back into her apartment. The fire escape itself seemed to be broken so Mrs. Abbot couldn't go out on it herself. Could he come and use his super-tallness power to pick the cat off the fire escape and put it back in her room?

Mrs. Abbot's cat was merely a cat, and perhaps the fatigue of a Superhero can somehow outweigh the need to save the life of a cat, and protect a heart from breaking if the cat should die. At that moment, he felt that it did. He said "I really don't feel like I should do this. I'm tired to the bone. I did months of adjudicating" (but he silently knew that his interlocutor had no concept of the value of that work) "and then I came back here and had to distend my body with water from a fire hydrant and spew it on fires for twenty-four hours. And then not long after in the middle of the night I had to get up from my bed and go stabilize the Exner Building, put my weight into it to prevent a fatal collapse. And I've been doing this kind of thing for years. That's just the most recent things I've done. I am completely depleted. I'm sorry."

But the voice on the other end of the line was persistent. "But... Mrs. Abbot's cat is the town mascot... we need Mrs. Abbot's cat... That's all we have to keep us going here... Mrs. Abbot's cat needs you. We all need you. It's not like it's a big deal to just use your tallness power. You're the Superhero."

Pinned to the wall by the reality created by this phone call, the Superhero thought for ten seconds. Which would be harder, to say "no" to the voice on the phone and let them figure out how to save the cat (at some risk of letting the cat die, he well knew), or to just go out there, pop a few tallness pills, do some rapid, painful growth, and pick the cat off the fire escape?

When we measure a person, we often think of how they look right now. But a person is also made up of the things that make them change and determine the direction in which they change, and also, made up of the thing that changes the way they change, the change of the change. That which is on a higher level drives that which is

on a lower level. Behind the scenes, in a person, is a tendency which enables the rest of them to become evident to all.

In that moment, it dawned on the Superhero that he had a secret superpower he was not aware of, but which, he realized, everyone who called on him for help was instinctively aware of, which had kept him going and kept him stuck in his job for years and years, ever since it became apparent to him and the people around him that he was the Superhero. This secret superpower was the ability to respond to the need in front of him, despite his fatigue, to have part of his life be independent from his body and its exhaustion, and to be able to use that part of his life to will and to act.

He considered, in that ten seconds, "Who am I? What am I? Do I get to choose?" The ten seconds ended but he still didn't speak.

The voice spoke. "Oh, so you're not going to help us with Mrs. Abbot's cat." The voice was offended. "You have better things to do, I guess cause you're the *Superhero*. Fine. But you're never going to hear the end of this. Imagine that, a Superhero who wouldn't save a cat." The person with the voice hung up.

Now he wondered, what should he do? His awareness of the questions of "Who am I?" and "What am I?" opened to him an uncertainty that he felt too tired to resolve. He could not decide to send the letter of resignation, nor could he, from that point on, respond to phone calls asking for help. "Who am I?, What am I?" "Am I a Superhero in who I am? In what I am?" When his mind got together its wits and faced reality, he considered these things.

Unrecognized Minority Suffering

16 July 2024

Being part of a "recognized minority group" in Western countries (LGBT+, racial minority, etc.) gains you the power of all the people who have recognized you. But being part of an unrecognized minority group, or not being part of a group at all, means that you don't get the power of mass political opinion in your favor. Sometimes religious people get recognition for their religion-associated suffering, but often they don't. Maybe the idea is that if your religion is causing you problems, you can just convert away from it. But if you know the truth, and are loyal to the truth, you aren't really that free to convert away from it, despite the fact that society might not recognize the truth and thus the necessity of your adherence to it.

The Bible is a book largely for people undergoing religion-associated suffering, which largely went unrecognized in their day. (Perhaps Cyrus was motivated by the suffering of the Jews to let them go back?) The strategies for dealing with suffering in the Bible prepared the Jews and early Christians to survive and thrive in hostile environments, where they could not get redress (or often could not) from the authorities, no matter how just the Jewish or early Christian cause may have been.

If you believe something that most people don't, you can't get what you need by claiming your rights, by claiming that you deserve it, but instead, have to be a leader. You don't demand like a consumer, but must produce.

The Sea Release

19 July 2024

I wrote an album in 2023 called *The Sea*, and now have a demo up (on Bandcamp). I don't know if or when I will ever make a more polished version of it. I feel like I should be a writer, first. Writing songs is close to being a writer. The rest of the process of getting songs out (practicing, recording demos, performing; or, the more "industrial" things, which I haven't done, like making an official studio recording, dealing with music industry people, making a music video, online marketing, going on tour) gets further and further away from writing.

Making demos might be OK sometimes. Songwriting can do things that regular writing can't. Right now I feel like taking a break from songwriting, though.

Temporal, Eternal, Secular, Theistic Wellbeing

15 August 2024

Temporal vs. eternal well-being, and secular vs. theistic:

The secular world recognizes certain things as belonging to well-being (this is secular well-being).

God recognizes certain things as belonging to well-being (this is theistic well-being).

Temporal well-being is about how to make the moment good.

Eternal well-being is about how to secure a good eternity for people.

Theistic well-being matters inherently.

Secular well-being matters instrumentally in furthering theistic well-being.

Within theistic well-being, eternal well-being matters inherently.

Temporal well-being matters inherently but is less important than eternal well-being.

It can be instrumental in furthering eternal well-being.

Temporal well-being should be pursued if it does not conflict with eternal well-being.

The Beekeeper

15 August 2024

This was originally from an old book I am no longer publishing, from 2014. I made changes for clarity.

I was talking with a beekeeper recently. In the course of his business, he helps people who let things get overgrown. The bees take up residence in all kinds of things. For instance, inside couches left at the edge of the property. When people let things get overgrown, it's because they don't want to or can't face reality. In some ideal world, a person could leave their property overgrown, but in San Diego County, where we live, this creates a fire risk. The local government can assess that a property is dangerous and give a deadline: clear out the fire risks or have your property seized.

If the owners have bees on their property, nobody will want to clear the brush for them. Nobody wants to get stung, although beekeepers tolerate it. So they would have to call in the beekeeper first. Time passes. They still don't want to deal with their issue. So maybe they have a month left to clear their land, or else they'll lose their whole property. Also, they don't have much money -- this is a complicating factor.

So my friend the beekeeper makes a deal with them. They can pay him in installments, with the balance due in 6 months. He takes a risk: if they lose their property, they won't have money to pay him, and they'll move and be hard to track down.

In the particular case we talked about, the following is what happened: They agreed to his offer (installments, the balance due in 6 months), he removed the bees, and they succeeded in bringing the property into compliance. But time passed, and he didn't have his money. So he wrote a letter saying "You've got two months left to pay my bill. If you don't, I'm going to bring the bees back." (He keeps the bees he collects on his own property.) Within a week he was paid in full.

He said that he does this to wake people up. He says he's a nice guy. (I agree with that assessment.) He says people need to get a wakeup call from someone nice. In contrast, other people would refuse to help them, leaving them with their money and their problem. He

makes them pay the price, holds them accountable, but he doesn't want to destroy them.

He said that in another similar case, there was a woman who was paying him back $35 a week, with money orders that cost more than a dollar. From this, he inferred that she didn't even have a bank account, otherwise she would have written a check. So with half the balance paid, he wrote her a letter: "Your good will so far, in paying what you have paid, and the promise of more good deeds to be done by you in the future, is your repayment." That is, he forgave the rest of her debt.

Trust Contracts With God

15 August 2024

We form "trust contracts" with God: we trust and obey God if he 1) appears a certain way (we trust a certain version of God), 2) he requires obedience that works for us, 3) he offers benefits that work for us.

Someone can negotiate a bad trust contract with God (bad from God's point of view), and yet fulfill their end of the bargain, within that contract.

"Out Of This World" by Edwyn Collins

30 August 2024

I first heard "Out Of This World", by Edwyn Collins, when I was in high school, an impressionable time of life.

I didn't understand the lyrics fully, and maybe still don't. My initial vague understanding was that it was about a New Age person ("guru"; "love is in the season", as I misheard it, which I thought had something to do with astrology) who wants to "break out of this world". Maybe sort of like the Heaven's Gate cult. But now I look at the lyrics more closely and it seems like the song may be about a romantic relationship (or maybe also a social scene) that makes a "totality" that the singer wants to break out of. Or maybe his "New Age" romantic partner is the one who wants to break out of the world, combining the two previous interpretations. Maybe it's about a specific situation, perhaps from Collins' life.

I like Collins' song particularly for the emotional loading it puts on "I need to find a way to break out of this world / Yes, there's got to be a way to break out of this world." Maybe that's the main part of the song to me, and the rest does not come through in the emphasis.

The lyrics sites copy each other and seem to all be wrong, but I got a copy of the CD from the library and here are the lyrics from the liner notes:

> I'm praying for rain
> I'm praying that you'll come to your senses
> Because whilst you bask in the warmth of the sun
> We're vulnerable and defenceless
> There are so many people who have come to depend on you
> There are even some impressionable souls [but the recording says "fools"]
> For whom you are a guru
>
> And you turn to them and you say

Love is in this season
But the seasons change
Then what will you believe in?
When the winter comes
That's when I'll be leaving
I leave to find a way
To break out of this world
[Recording adds "Yes there's got to be a way
To break out of this world."]

You won't burn out
Yours is a love that smoulders
So why do you feel that you're carrying the weight
of the world upon your shoulders?
Not that it amounts to much
But I'd help you if I could
Now don't waste your breath refusing my help
That's already understood

And you turn to me and you say
Love is in this season
But the seasons change
Then what will you believe in?
When the winter comes
That's when I'll be leaving
I leave to find a way
To break out of this world
Yes there's got to be a way
To break out of this world

Response to Leftism

30 August 2024

Leftism, for the purposes of this post, could have two different meanings. In a broad sense, it is an active, politically-oriented humanism that focuses on this life, and is practically atheistic. More narrowly, it is a specific culture attempting to implement that kind of humanism, taking up particular causes such as anti-colonialism and anti-capitalism.

One approach to leftism is to think of it as a flag you fly. Your personality makes you the kind of person who is into it. If you had a different personality, you might be an "altruist", a more or less non-political humanist who also focuses on this life, and is also practically atheistic. Leftism allows you to resonate with yourself. In this it is not different from any other ideology, including Christianity.

People might like leftism for its sense of moral clarity. If you want to have strong feelings about right and wrong, you should seek to minimize uncertainty. This requires you to minimize how much you consider counterfactuals. So, it makes sense that you would gravitate toward a worldview that involves no uncertainty, where you can make your claims most strongly in the public sphere. People will not question your basic assumptions, and thus you can state things most strongly. This gives you rhetorical power, helping you to win political fights. Leftism is "activist" rather than "altruistic" (at least in emphasis), so it's important to win political fights.

Given that particular motivation for being a leftist, it makes sense that leftists would be humanists who focus on this life, and are practically atheistic.

By "humanist", I could mean something "philosophical", like in effective altruism. This "philosophical" humanism is open to / vulnerable to / ought naturally to lead to the idea of "expanding the moral circle", reasoning that since people expanded their circle of concern to include those people of other races, they should continue to expand their circle, leading to concern for non-humans. In that case, "humanism" is a particular region in the space of caring for

sentient beings. Or, the "philosophical" bent of "philsophical humanism" could lead it to other conclusions based on reason.

Or, it could mean something "instinctual", in other words, humans have moral instincts, generally favoring human well-being, and people act on them, trust what they say unthinkingly. It's possible to have both an instinctual and philosophical humanism at the same time, or maybe for the two to mix in one thing. The more instinctive the humanism is, the more certitude you can have in holding to it.

Humanism is something that everyone approves of on some level, at least, all self-interested humans do, in the sense that what is good for humans is good for them. It's a relatively easy value for humans to rally around. Nobody acts like humanism is a crazy value to have. This reinforces leftists' certitude. Similarly, leftists assume that God doesn't exist for practical purposes (or are avowed atheists). Belief in God is controversial, but we all accept that the secular world exists. So belief in God does not allow as high a sense of certitude as practical atheism.

The benefit of increasing certitude is that it empowers and emboldens people to act. The drawback is if it is mistaken, causing people to do insufficient good, or cause gratuitous harm, because they are out of touch with reality.

Leftists are concerned about the truth. I recently [as of first drafting this post] listened to an episode of *The Dig* about US colonization of the Philippines. *The Dig* is a leftist podcast. The whole point of the podcast episode was that certain things had actually happened in the past (enactment and enforcement of colonial US policies, Filipino migration to the US, labor agitation). Similarly, I have listened to some episodes of *Citations Needed* over the years (another leftist podcast) and the whole premise of the show is that people say misleading things which need to be exposed. The truth is something out there that we don't just know without listening to it, uncovering it, etc. The guest on *The Dig*, a college professor, had to do research to write his book. He didn't just know everything in the book before he started working on it. Also, reason is employed to extrapolate from evidence to discover the truth, something that is foundational to *Citations Needed*.

I can't say that I know everything about leftism, but only its most obvious features. Those features (the vibe and subject matter of

podcasts and online articles) make me think that leftism is not friendly to the practice of questioning the foundations of morality. In other words, the truth is out there to be discovered, and rationally examined, but the truth about what morality is and where morals comes from is not out there to be discovered and rationally examined, rather it's something that we know innately (instinctively). Or it is simply not the practice of the left to ask if its ideas of moral truth could be wrong. So this seems to be a turning away from leftism's commitment to the truth.

Does it matter what the foundations of morality are? Is answering that question really going to lead someone to say that murder is OK (to pick one obvious example)? To the second question, I think the answer is no, but I say that because I've thought about why it's wrong according to my theory of morality's foundation, and my reasoning for why it is that way leads me to commit to other features of my worldview that affect how people should be treated, and what really constitutes their well-being, causing me to diverge from some other people's moral approaches, though we all agree murder is wrong. Morality is a huge part of leftism and politics in general, and so leaving it as a blank spot on the map of the world is likely to fail to discover some relevant truths.

Similarly, leftism's practical atheism and emphasis on this life, to me, seems to be a turning away from the commitment to truth. Asking the public sphere to be theistic is a lot, but I don't think I'm pushing the Overton Window too far to suggest that ethically-oriented atheists and practical atheists (both "activists" like leftists or "altruists" like effective altruists) spend a certain amount of time seriously considering arguments for the existence of God and also the consequences to doing good / pursuing human well-being in case there is a significant chance that God does exist (something like at least 10% chance). I think that openness to reality as it could be, out there, should cause us to consider whether God exists, and atheists and practical atheists don't currently seem to do that.

These issues with truth are the main criticism I would make to leftists, since I feel like it might make sense to them from their current worldview. But my own position is that of ethical theism, that the well-being of God is important and neglected, and so on an emotional level I react against atheistic humanism, one which explicitly rejects questions of God's well-being, or naive humanism, which unthinkingly assumes that God's moral status doesn't matter.

However, there are some points where I agree with leftism. I want to see people becoming more active and having more certitude in their pursuit of the good (although I don't want to maximize activity and certitude), and hopefully that can come without being at the expense of the truth or God. I would say that working toward a better negotiation between the three values of seeking activity, truth, and God has been a significant part of my life.

Also, while I think that the public sphere should optimize for people's relationships with God and eternal well-being, what is upstream of that is not necessarily out of line with any particular political philosophy. I recognize that this life has to be governed somehow or other, and non-capitalistic approaches are not off the table. I'm not dogmatic on political philosophies, but instead assume that multiple philosophies could be good if they were well-implemented, and all are bad if they are poorly-implemented.

Considering some of the projects of "narrow" leftism, I can think of ways that capitalism is bad for people spiritually (i.e. threatening their relationships with God and likelihood of being with God eternally), such as its fostering of consumerism. Likewise colonialism is psychologically traumatic, leaving people distracted by it for years after it is officially over. This distraction can incline people to see each other as enemies, rather than focusing on the enmity of Satan.

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The narrative of leftism can involve the "little guy" being fooled by the "big guy", the system, the power structure, into going along with the big guy's interests. This could encourage distrust of the big guy. Naturally, one could identify God as the ultimate big guy. Is God a bad big guy? Do we need to cultivate our self-governance so that we don't get taken in by him? We need to know whether God is good or bad. If he really is bad, then we should resist him. But if he really is good, then obviously he is not literally all-powerful (something constrains him, perhaps his goodness), and there is some other power structure that opposes him, which pushes against him to make the world gratuitously bad. That power structure is inclined to produce propaganda of its own, which can fool us into doing things with evil consequences, when we think that we are doing things with good consequences.

In Nathan J. Robinson's "Manufacturing Consent and the Case of

Satan", from leftist magazine *Current Affairs*' July/August 2022 issue, he develops an account of Satan as the "little guy" who rebels against the corrupt bureaucracy of God. Robinson begins his piece with with a disclaimer saying that it isn't an attack on Christianity, but rather an "exercise in critical thinking, by taking one of the most familiar known stories of Good and Evil, and flipping it on its head as completely as possible to show how even in the case of the supposed most evil character conceivable, an alternate story could be constructed using additional information that might give us a wholly different understanding of what is going on." People tend to think that they're David and their enemies are Goliath, and often people's enemies are both David and Goliath at the same time, in different ways. From the perspective of a political person, especially a practically atheistic political person, the world is ruled by individual elites and elite culture. Powerful minorities who hold onto power. Perhaps in this era, neoliberals or something like that. But from the perspective of a religious person, the world is ruled by practically atheistic ideologies. Both secular leftists (the "little guys" or their champions) and the elite are practical atheists -- by their trusting and acting, they deny the existence of God. And ethically, they are humanists or egoists, not theists (so they do not acknowledge the moral status of God). The dispute over whether "big guys" or "little guys" rule is somewhat orthogonal to the question of whether people acknowledge God. I try to be politically neutral (this is a political choice). This enables me to focus on religious outcomes. As a political person, my alignment with the power structure (at least my de facto alignment by not being an activist against it, if that's how my attempts at neutrality are to be construed) may make me look like I'm on the side of "Goliath". But as a religious person, I am on the side of "David", that is, God, who is the dirt that we step on.

Everything we do to someone else, God, as all-knowing, experiences firsthand. God is good, goodness itself. (Morality is a personal being whom we call "God".) So when we do wrong, we violate God himself. He lives in the present moment and has had to live through century after century of us abusing each other and rejecting him. Because we are the ones who choose whether to trust God, he has to come up with a version of himself and his religion which we'll trust, which is usually not the truth. He is the one who is maximally committed to us, and we are not as committed to him. So we have the power in the relationship. We set up ourselves as gods over each

other and over him.

God can't do wrong, so he must contract with evil beings to will our temptation, and they have extracted terms from him that make the world gratuitously evil. We don't understand where this evil comes from, and sometimes it tempts us to lose trust in God, or tempts us to willfully reject God. People have hard jobs, and so does God.

Sometimes "big guys" can be good. Or the good person in a story can be simultaneously both the "big guy" and a "little guy". And sometimes the "little guy" (both individually and as a culture) can be bad.

Doing the right thing requires us make choices of which morality to pursue. In order to do the most good according to one frame, we must do bad according to another. To pursue religious good seems to threaten secular or political good, and vice versa. Robinson seems to want us to use critical thinking (or a similar word would be "discernment"). He offers a kind of temptation to question Christianity (although that may not be his real objective). I offer a temptation to question secular leftism. After either there could be a time of confusion, where a person needs to use their own mind to sort things out. So truth-seeking (critical thinking and discernment) is needed.

If by chance a leftist reads this and wants an introduction to my views, I have another blog they can read, more developed although somewhat provisional. I think it's important to communicate the right mood along with the right thoughts, and that plain writing is somewhat bad at this, so I have a demo of an album I recorded that covers a lot of the ideas I'm into, including some relevant to leftism. I also have an attempted proof of the existence of God, which is an important part of my moral foundation.

Signal vs. Noise

30 August 2024

When looking at life, there are some things that matter, and some that don't. Part of maturity is learning to sort out which are which. Some things are signal, and more attention should be paid to them, and some things are noise, and less attention should be paid to them.

Noise is where signal comes from, so you can't focus 100% on signal.

(Noise is characterized by fluctuation, and signal by relative steadiness.)

I listened to a podcast episode about how Elizabeth Fraser was summoned by Tim Buckley's "Song to the Siren" into the life of Buckley's son Jeff Buckley (who admired her singing, and she sang "Song to the Siren"), and then Jeff died the way a siren would kill him, pulled under the river in Memphis, Tennessee. Perhaps some kind of evil spirit spoke through Tim, then through Fraser, then killed Jeff, a spirit rendered resonant and eternal through its connection to the imaginal world, where the various siren myths constantly replay their story, whether you think of them or not. The episode's guest, the expert as it were on the siren theory of Jeff Buckley's death, seemed to be frightened of the spiritual world, and the world of conspiracies, the conspiracies that spiritual beings were seeming to perpetrate on the land of humans.

There are conspiracies that speak of the political world, that political figures are figures in the spiritual world of interconnected myth. Even if you are not a conspiratorially-minded person, you might start to feel the pull of the spirit world when you watch politics, the dark spirits that work through people, with politics as the occasion. Politics is a drama.

And then even more mundane are all the ways that the secular world is depressingly messed-up, and how we have to fix it. The day in and day out of seeking reforms, or better technologies.

All these things have some bearing on eternal life, but often, not much. They tend to be noise. At the end of the Millennium, the

horrible things happening in the temporal world will only matter a little bit. But your heart, whether it is the heart of God or not, matters a lot.

--

From about the age of 15 to sometime in my early 30s, I listened to Elizabeth Fraser a lot (in Cocteau Twins, and also collaborating and solo). From 27 to 31, I wrote books where I wrote very quickly, not deliberately. Perhaps I was channeling a spirit? (A lot of the content of the books can be traced to thoughts already stored up in my mind, through hours spent thinking.) At the end of that period, I was concerned that I was channeling something, so I turned against the practice.

But looking back now, I don't think I was doing anything really bad. It's possible to channel God or spirits aligned with him, as well as bad ones. Or to channel a mixture of good and bad spirits. Trees aren't automatically good or bad. It matters what kind of fruit they bear.

The Biblical prophets spoke God's words (through a process I would guess at least analogous to artistic channeling), and King Saul was possessed by both good and bad spirits. In another life, Fraser could have been part of the people group of prophets who lived in Israel.

What counts as signal versus noise has a lot to do with background assumptions. If God does not exist, or his existence can't be relied on, then there may be no guarantee of the eternal. The temporal could kill you right now. So you have to watch for every threat. But if God exists, at least as in MSL and VMH, then the temporal threats become powerful energetic noise. In a sense, you can tune them out, although they can still affect you in the moment.

What you think of as threat is affected by whether it could be from God in some weird way. Many things are negotiations between God and Satan, so what is intended for bad in one way is intended for good in another. God himself is somewhat weird, and does wholly good things in a weird way. With God, a bad thing can be deliberately turned into a good thing over time. If you know that God exists, then things that would otherwise seem like serious threats might seem to be less threatening. Then they can drop out of your register of concern, and you can focus on signal. The signal being, do you have the heart of God?

Hierarchy of Virtues

26 September 2024

As someone trying to live by MSL, how should I approach attempting to elicit virtues in other people? Which ones should I worry about?

Meta:

These are the virtues that I can expect of just about anyone, of any religious/spiritual persuasion:

Pursue moral excellence. People's ideas of what moral excellence entails may not overlap with mine 100%, so maybe I would emphasize the things that do overlap.

Have a good relationship with morality itself. Have the sort of relationship to moral excellence that can lead to eventually choosing to be 100% morally excellent.

Seek the truth.

Be openminded. Particularly such that, if presented the evidence for Jesus, one would believe in him. (Or whoever God turns out to be.)

MSL-specific:

In addition to the "meta" ones, these are ones I can expect of MSLians, maybe some others:

Minimize sexuality and anger.

Be against unbearability.

Try to be productive. Generally that means finding work and doing it as much and as long as you can, maintaining a sufficiently high quality of work (which may require taking breaks and moderating workload). But, if you have no other choice, pursue the cross, risk yourself even to the point of losing ability to work if it's the most effective thing you can do / is truly necessary.

Put God first.

Bear burdens.

Believe that God exists. (Internalize MSL or other reasons to believe in God.) Apply the fact that God exists wherever relevant.

(There may be others to add later.)

Biblical:

This is what I would expect of MSLians who seemingly have "run out of things to do" in the "meta" and "MSL-specific" categories, at least directionally.

Pursue things that could reasonably be inferred are preferences of God, given the Bible. (If they aren't covered by the "meta" or "MSL-specific" categories above.) I don't know exactly what I would say in this category, and won't know for a while (until I do the work to read the Bible with this question in mind, which could be a number of years from now).

Is Heroism Virtuous?

26 September 2024

"Heroic" things: doing good so that other people don't have to. Is this really virtuous? Maybe there is only one year to get something done and we can't wait ten years for everyone else to do it collectively. It makes sense to have a hero do it for contingent reasons. It may be worth doing, if the good it brings about is necessary or greater than the cost. The cost is that other people don't have that virtue elicited from them.

The ten talent person can do ten times as much as the one talent person. But in the parable, the mindset of the ten was very different than that of the one. If the ten talent person had nine of their talents taken from them, they would use their ten talent mindset and try to make the best of the one they have left. But the one talent person never learned the ambitious, generous mentality of the ten talent person, and is fearful (and maybe worse) with their one talent. The change in mindset is what is critical for the one talent person, and the ten talent person could deprive them of that change in mindset by doing things for them.

What to do when you have excess talent? Some people (disabled, children, elderly, sick, poor) sometimes really can't do things for themselves. Helping them would be one opportunity (although maybe that opportunity should be offered to one-talent mindset people as anti-temptation). Artistic and intellectual pursuits can absorb a lot of talent without depriving too many other people of their opportunity to work. There may be other ways to use up excess talent. Promoting the change in mindset, or other aspects of holiness, is the best use of talent. But not every moment or resource is one you can use for that purpose.

My Role

26 September 2024

I've been thinking about jobs for myself, related to my writing project. One obvious job is to make sure that the most important things that I promote are actually true. This job might never end. I feel like I have to be the one to do it. If no one else does it, certainly; and even if other people contribute, I have to keep up with what they're doing.

But other than that, what other roles should I take on?

I have been curious about the relationship between MSL and the various non-Christian religions. For instance, in Indonesia, there are five official religions, the religions of Pancasila (Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism). A project I thought of doing was to learn about those five religions and how they related to Indonesians, and thus I would know how to relate MSL to them. There are two dimensions to MSL, the surface layer of doctrines, and then the deeper layers of the implications of the doctrines. The surface layer is finite, and is possibly something I could pull off with a lot of effort, despite not having grown up with Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, or Confucianism, nor Indonesian language or culture. The deeper layer requires deeper expertise that I will probably never have. It makes a lot more sense for someone of, say, Muslim background who finds MSL interesting to do the work of relating it to Islam, than for me to. This is also basically true of the surface layer. (With the number of readers I have, I am not too optimistic that anyone is that into MSL and is looking for an intellectual project, but I might as well suggest this one to any who by chance might read this post, now, or later.)

That accounts for non-Christian religions. But what about relating MSL to Christianity, particularly in America? Here I feel like I'm a "native speaker" and could potentially do something some day. I've done some of this in things I've posted already, and started a more organized project that furthers this, but have put it on hold for now. (This project would be more than I could complete, and also it makes sense to offer it in case someone wants an intellectual project.)

What about interfacing with secular culture (and secular concerns) in America? I've done a fair amount of this in *Formulalessness* and other writing and may pursue it further someday, but probably wouldn't as much if I saw someone else doing it.

If MSL proves too false to promote, maybe it doesn't make sense to promote it in the various religious and national cultures. But, speaking as a Christian, it seems Christians are happy to consider teachers of moderately false doctrines to be OK Christians who are basically leading people to God (i.e., members of denominations that teach substantially different doctrines, like about soteriology). This points to a kind of pragmatism about truth. I don't like this, but if MSL fails, I'm not sure what truth there is. Maybe someone can suggest one? If not, all that is left is pragmatism, in which case I think MSL (or the New Wine System), as foundations for VMH, deserve their place at the table of Christian denominations, due to the pragmatic value of VMH. Maybe some would find this a good enough reason to try to promote it now. (Maybe if MSL fails, what I would be left with is truth, but a truth so vague that it permits a lot of different possible doctrinal approaches, including VMH, or MSL taken as "mental software" rather than as what's actually true.)

I could do various activities that from the perspective of my writing project are "self-promotion". The only one I can think of right now is to pursue music more. I may continue to write songs and maybe make demos, but I don't feel like it's a great idea to promote myself a lot before I get my philosophy figured out. I can't prevent others from promoting me and I guess I would be fine if they did, but I'm not going to push for that right now.

For myself, again, I think what is most critical is to examine the details of MSL to make sure that it is solid, and that is what I am focusing on for the next part of my life.

Hierarchy of Virtues

11 October 2024

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(This list may be incomplete.)

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Overview of my Writing

11 October 2024

What am I trying to do with my writing project?

I can change this over time, if I want, but I thought I should write up what I think I'm doing and basically what I'm saying so far, and also consider where I might go in the future. I may revisit this next year around this time of year to see if anything has changed, if I remember.

This overview is largely based on things that I've written before, especially in *Formulalessness*. But some of the things in this overview, I've thought of recently and mostly haven't written about elsewhere.

This overview is based on my perspective now, what I think about now, and doesn't mention some things that I used to be into more. For a past overview, see the "categories of my writing" page I wrote while I was still working on *Formulalessness*.

I've been motivated by different desires. One is to pursue theistic apologetics. Apologetics works both to show the unbeliever why a religion is true, and to show religious people why a particular version of their religion is true. Or, to show people why they should believe God exists, and why a particular version of God is the one who exists.

Another is to understand civilizational development. Where are we headed as a civilization? What is the end of civilizational development?

Another is to promote the excellence of culture. How is it that we can be excellent people (however defined)? The kind of people who improve and/or actively maintain civilization so that it does not decline?

Related, both religious and civilizational, how can we be real, authentic people (for some definition of "real" and "authentic")? How can we live up to the minimum (high) standard for being human?

Perhaps I can unify all of these motivations into one description of

my writing project:

As civilization develops, we face the prospect of losing, failing, dying -- what most people concerned about civilization seem to worry about. But what I worry about is, what if we succeed? What if we succeed badly, in such a way that we close ourselves off from what is really good, which, actually, is the minimum we should stop at?

We should seek a way to know what good and bad (or good and evil) really are, so that we actually know what we're doing when we try to progress as a civilization. How can we know what values to have? Perhaps we can try to understand the nature of morality itself (the standard of morality and its capacity to validate).

How can we know something about morality? Morality exists. It must be like all other existing things in the way that all existing things are the same (a nice philosophical sentence). Everything is made of consciousness. So morality is a conscious being. To contact conscious reality is to experience it. Morality experiences all that exists in order to validate it. Morality experiences, firsthand, all experience. Every unbearable pain is unbearable to it. For something to be unbearable, it must be rejected at some point. Unbearable sensations (painful or otherwise), it must reject. So we know that unbearability is evil / bad (rejected by morality). But we don't know all of what is unbearable to morality. Morality could choose to cease to validate the very existence of any given thing and that thing would cease to exist. (Existing involves a certain amount of validity, and to exist requires that something has that amount of validity.) So morality has the power, knowledge, and sensitivity of God, and is good -- goodness itself. If a being we might take to be God exists and is not identical with this being, it is not really God. (This paragraph develops a natural theology, finding God in nature rather than revelation.)

So God exists, now what? We would seek to know more about God. Perhaps traditional religions contain revelation from God. After developing my natural theology further, it turns out that there's a decent chance that the Bible comes from God. Although we don't know that the Bible is inerrant (and we have reason to suspect that it's not), we also can't rule out the possibility that it contains real information from God, and we should (carefully and thoughtfully) try to obey it. (I have not seriously looked into all the other scriptures, but suspect that the Bible (we'll say, something like the

66 book Protestant canon, although I haven't read the Catholic or Orthodox deuterocanons) will end up being the most recommended by my natural theology.) While there is a decent, although necessarily somewhat unspecifiable, chance that the Bible contains useful information from God, it's uncertain, and our primary obligation is to obey God in our preferences, actions, and trustings based on natural theology, which is more certain. (Without having done all the work to relate my natural theology to the Bible, I think the Bible mostly adds to without having to conflict with my natural theology.) (For an introduction to my natural theology, see MSL.)

The thing that made me think that I should try to have my own intellectual project was the discovery of the New Wine System, an interpretation of the Bible developed by Philip Brown. It is more than just a container of the following ideas, but these were the ones that I found most interesting: 1. We must become completely holy before going to heaven. 2. This is significantly up to us to complete, such that there is a real danger we will not (something we truly could choose to not complete). 3. There is a long, finite period of time after this life and before heaven (in the New Wine System, the Millennium / Resurrection), for us to complete this process of becoming holy. Additionally, there is the danger that you will harden yourself on a level of holiness less than complete, through complacency and self-satisfaction, so that possessing virtue could be bad for you if it tempts you to not keep being hungry for righteousness. Having more time to develop doesn't help you if you use it to harden yourself, or fail to unharden yourself. If you harden yourself and never unharden, someday you will reject God and he will have to destroy you, because you will (in your unholiness) be unbearable to him. (This basic theology, whether "New Wine" (biblically rooted) or "MSL" (philosophically rooted) I call "voluntary millennial holiness".)

(MSL says morality (God) can't stand what is immoral forever, yet that morality values what is valuable and so tries to preserve you if possible (i.e., if you will allow it), giving you an opportunity (like a long, finite period of time) to come to agree with it. Thus MSL leads into VMH.)

VMH may sound somewhat like Roman Catholicism or Mormonism, and it has some resemblance. (Possibly also to Eastern Orthodoxy, which I haven't looked into as much.) But I don't think Catholicism or Mormonism (and I suspect also not Eastern Orthodoxy), even if

technically similar, strike the note that I think follows from VMH, which is one more similar to very logically consistent evangelicalism, a kind of urgent concern for the eternal well-being of others, with a sense of danger or even the horror of choosing wrong. However, unlike that kind of evangelicalism, VMH does not focus primarily on conversion, but rather the whole process of becoming holy, including conversion. Also, because of the Millennium (from the Bible's "1,000 years"), humans have a much longer, though still finite, amount of time to become holy, than the amount of time allowed to come to conversion (this life of maybe 80 years length) under traditional evangelicalism. So while traditional evangelicalism can be sometimes strange, unhealthy, and overly focused on conversion, due to the urgency of saving people in the 80 (or fewer) years they have in this life, this urgency is somewhat diluted in VMH. And VMH emphasizes holiness, not just conversion, a remedy of one of traditional evangelicalism's potential weaknesses, where people are converted but don't develop Christian character.

VMH is tolerant of other religions without ignoring its own truth claims. The truth matters, and one religion can be right while others are wrong. But if VMH is true, we can find out in the next life (Millennium) what is true. Believing the wrong doctrines is not necessarily a ticket to hell, unlike in traditional evangelicalism. However, not being open-minded (such that you can't be corrected in the next life about who God is), not being morally excellent (arguably MSL's and VMH's definitions of moral excellence overlap significantly with most religions'), and having a bad attitude about morality and the process of becoming morally excellent, are things that perhaps a serious practitioner of any of the major religions could find objectionable, and which VMH finds objectionable, and these are things that a "VMHer" would hope to "anti-tempt" others away from even if it's not realistic that they adopt VMH (MSL, the New Wine System) themselves in this life.

The essence of holiness is in the heart, not in behavior, but bad behavior hurts God even if a person's heart is good. Controlling behavior may have some short-term value (certainly it allows civilization to function, as when police apprehend people who have committed crimes). But controlling behavior does not change the heart. Being too controlling causes people to rebel and turn against the values of those who control. So VMHers have an incentive to try to minimize controlling others, rather preferring to "anti-tempt"

them (like tempting, but with a different spirit, and producing an attraction to God, rather than temptation's product, sin and enmity toward God).

In VMH, there are aspects of the pursuit of holiness that are 100% under God's control (whether he trusts you, and if our bodies are essential to who we are in some sense, the cleansing of our bodies so we no longer have sinful instincts, since a sinful thought that occurs to you against your will (presumably from your body / brain instincts) is one that is still unbearable to God). But one aspect that God has no power over, that is 100% up to you, is your heart, your free willed intentions, preferences, identity, etc. So, God is not really literally omnipotent, although in a sense he is, because he can't let you be you and still make you do exactly what he wants. God is significantly at our mercy and at the mercy of how we are willing to trust him. Religion is shaped by our sense of what is admirable or trustworthy, and through religion we trust God, the version of God that we can trust.

God endures our sinfulness and our suffering, and has done so for century after century. It is as raw for him as it ever was, because he sees things as they are in themselves (his patience is "longsuffering", not an insensitivity or deferral of emotion). God endures our rejection of him. He is not necessarily alone among holy beings, but unrequited love can always be hard to bear, and hard to bear for someone who sees and feels things as they really are. So, understanding this, we feel empathy for God, and this should lead to us seeking to eliminate our enmity toward him, in all parts of us.

So we are to become "ethical theists", those who are ethically oriented toward God's interests and well-being, just as there are "ethical humanists", those who are ethically oriented toward the interests and well-being of humans.

The most striking Christian image is of Jesus on the cross, suffering every second of it. Similarly, in MSL, a striking image is of God, the sustainer of the universe, suffering continually from the beginning of sin until now.

Much of God's suffering comes from human free will making evil choices. We have to have a real choice between good and evil (good normally looking so clearly good) in order to deeply love the good by rejecting evil. This choice is provided by temptation, which can't be willed by God himself, who is too holy. So other beings will our

temptation, and only evil beings would do so. They have some power over God because they can negotiate what their "wages" will be for willing our temptation. They negotiate for the world to be worse than what God would really like it to be. Evil beings are active in the world and sometimes active in our lives.

I imagine that "MSLians" (and perhaps other "VMHers") would be people who mourn, see horror, are patient and yet also have urgency in them, are active, have a long-term view, are tolerant yet truth-oriented, are serious, not inclined to control others, ideally healthy where health is a servant to holiness, and ideally concerned rather than anxious.

Philip Brown (IIRC) expressed the idea that New Wine Christians should not form a denomination, or that it would be best if they didn't. I feel that MSLians might go into different contexts, like different churches or other social scenes, as something like missionaries, whose base of support would be some kind of probably online or possibly local group of MSLians, not attempting to make a large "safe space" of a church with building and pastor, but still some kind of support group, while primarily living their lives in other cultures. This seems like the most realistic structure (at least, as opposed to having a traditional congregation) with low numbers of MSLians. It might be best for MSLians to not form imposing structures (not organized denominations, parachurch ministries, or maybe even conventional congregations) so that they can be as unthreatening as possible when embedded in social settings that do not share their beliefs, as de facto missionaries.

How would these people and their beliefs intersect with the future of civilization?

How will civilization end? One possibility is with "death" (the permanent decline of civilization). Although wiping out the entire human race is difficult, perhaps that could even occur. The other possibility, is "sustainability": Humans live within the means of their planet, not consuming resources faster than they can be renewed. They have societies that are stable enough that civilization neither dies out nor starts to consume resources unsustainably.

Other than this, civilization on Earth will mutate, grow, and shrink, and grow again, over and over, until it settles into one of those two forms of stability.

But humans could extend themselves beyond Earth. This, in an attempt to avoid death, and to multiply sentient life far beyond what one planet can sustain.

If MSL is correct, though, what's really important is that each person who comes into existence has a good chance of making it to heaven. God can always create more people. It is better to preserve the civilization that you have, because civilizations are painful things for God to develop (assuming that God likes civilizations for some kind of moral progress they embody -- or, that they are containers of good teachings that seem to need time to become "trustable"). But, just as the Millennium gives you a second lease on life, God can resurrect civilization, allowing more children to be born in case not enough were born under our watch.

While it's not necessarily bad to go "to the stars", it's not necessary. And, every settlement that comes from us will still have to face "sustainability or death".

"Sustainability" means to arrive at a social system that doesn't change outside of certain limits. If there is something seriously wrong with a social system, that doesn't threaten the system's persistence, then there is the danger of a "bad sustainability". A vivid example is a dystopia, like that of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. A similarly vivid example is a "dyseutopia", a superficially good society that is actually bad (arguably *Brave New World* fits the bill). Generally, we see *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as undesirable (some dictator-type people might disagree), and similarly with *Brave New World* (some transhumanists might disagree). Dictator-type people and transhumanists are relatively uncommon at least as of 2024, and perhaps the political process will marginalize and limit them over time. But two cultures that are currently very popular are what I might call "ordinary humanism" (secular, non-technophilic humanism) and "ordinary Christianity". Both of these have humans having normal families, the cycle of life, do not seek to transcend human biology, and they are relatively reasonable, humane, accommodating to many different types of people, are both fairly conservative compared to transhumanism. Many people are happy with one or the other "ordinary" ideology, or in some sense with both. But these things are actually "mediocre" (good, or seemingly good, things that keep you from what you really need), carrying complacency and small-scale sin. So an MSLian would find them to be dyseutopias, if they became locked in as the final culture or

cultures. They would be more dangerous than they appeared.

MSLians would want to guard against that. They might do so by radiating the lived values of excellence. They might also work to promote the idea that we haven't necessarily reached the ideal end. That a sustainability without the ability for an outsider to correct it is dangerous.

MSLians might make good maintainers of civilization. They believe something important is at stake, as long as we may still harden on sin. In principle, anything in the secular world could have some effect on whether people harden on sin. MSLians would have the life or death motivation to care about society as people settled into both a religious and secular complacency, as their secular needs, and thus their psychological needs, were satisfied. MSLians, then, might be prominent in whatever parts of culture actively work to maintain civilization. (I suspect that entrepreneurial-level innovation-like thinking is sometimes required to keep a complex system from running down.) MSLians could then always keep themselves open to whatever outsiders might show to be a more trustworthy way to go. Maybe outsider advice could be integrated smoothly into a sustainable system without destroying it, preserving sustainability?

I see our civilization as beginning to enter its Ecclesiastes phase. The author of Ecclesiastes seems to have been a highly civilized, advanced, experienced human being. He looks back on his life at all the things he's tried and finds everything "vain / vaporous". All that's left in the end is God. This, I periodically feel in myself, for all of society, and I think it is connected to my MSL beliefs. Some forms of art may have hit the point where it's largely the case that within them there is nothing new being made. The author of Ecclesiastes may have been wrong in some sense when he said there was "nothing new under the sun", but maybe he was just premature, and we will hit that point culturally. At some point, maybe now, but if not now, sometime in the future, we will have all of our options available. We will have metal, punk, and goth; cubism, Impressionism, and the styles of da Vinci and Rembrandt; Mac, Windows, Linux; Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and the atheistic explorations; and so on, with all the smaller variants and examples of these categories, and other categories like them. Then we can decide, which of these things we have experimented with are the ones we want to repeat to ourselves, like an old man

reading his favorite books rather than new ones, as we settle into our millennia-long cultural twilight, potentially the period of time in which most people who will ever live will live. (Maybe every generation when it's young explores all the diversity as if it's new, but they know that it's all been done before and nothing changes anything really.)

So VMHers (MSLians and New Wine Christians) might act as preservative agents that guide culture away from catastrophic ends and toward excellent ones, guiding our civilization into its best old age. Then, after people die and are resurrected to the Millennium, VMHers will work as "pastors" or "prophets", as they have in this life.

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What are some future directions for my writing that I can see?

My current project is to understand philosophy better in general, and specifically so that I can extend and defend MSL. I could see this taking the rest of my life, maybe. I could hand off some of the task to someone else, in theory, but probably still need to do it, so that I understand what they (or critics) say and can comment on it, as the "author"/"authority" of my own project.

Working on philosophy could naturally lead me to consider the question of the future. (The future is something philosophy can talk about.) I'm not the best with empirical / research-based work, so I probably should not work alone if I get into futurism. Futurism might include figuring out what physical sustainability would require at various levels of civilizational sophistication, and then working from that "backward" to the present, to see pathways to sustainability, then imagine how MSL might fit into that and keep it excellent. Or it could involve working "forward" from the present, looking at how cultures evolve over time, to see how to try not to drift into bad futures. Probably both "forward" and "backward" approaches are necessary.

The Bible is a relevant book to MSL, but how do the two relate? Specifically, if we fuse MSL and the Bible, who is God? And if the Bible contains information about God (which I won't assume can't be mixed in with information not from God), how do we obey the Bible given the risk that any particular commandment isn't really from him? I have already begun a project in that vein, and I do

think it's within my ability to do myself, if I say it's okay to simply consider an English translation, rather than getting into all the scholarship that could be brought to bear. But it would take a lot of time, nonetheless. Somebody should do the task, and since I've already started, I have some ideas about how to do it, but it may not be something I should really take the lead on.

My focus has largely been on Christianity and atheism in the West, especially America. I feel like I have a handle on that (not that I get all of any of those things, but I just feel basically comfortable making statements there because I grew up in that context). As attractive as they may be, non-Western national and religious cultures are not something I feel comfortable with, since I did not grow up in them. Relating VMH and MSL to those contexts is not for me, unless somehow I finish all the previous tasks and no one else has taken up the non-Western task other than me.

Abuse to Confirm Bad Self-Image

02 November 2024

If you have a deeply-ingrained sense that you are a bad person, perhaps one which is at least to some extent borne out by the facts, where can you go for validation in this world? Your friends and family may tell you everything is OK. After all, don't we show our friends and family the face that will please them? What would they know of our secret darkness? Your therapist may not really emphasize the dark truth, either. Liberal Christianity and evangelical Christianity may offer too much acceptance and the optimism of good news. Perhaps non-evangelical conservative Christianity is the main current in our culture that will affirm how you feel about yourself. But many are cut off from that current. (There might be other, secular ones that I'm not aware of.) Christianity is tempted to always make the story be about your forgiveness and redemption. But what you seem to need is someone who will look at your sins without flinching away to a view of a better future you, or to you through the lens of freedom from moral accountability.

But one person who will surely agree with you is the person you abuse so badly that despite any of their attempts to see things positively (attempts to fit in with the Christian or post-Christian insistence on optimism), their brains are tattooed with your foul language, so that they can't help but see you as a bad person. Them, at least, you can convince, even if no one else will see you as you really are.

100 Percent Human, 100 Percent Divine

07 December 2024

Christology tells us that Jesus was 100% human and 100% divine. I think Jesus as depicted in the gospels is a guide to who or what to be, at least for the kind of person who takes on a role like Jesus did on earth. So, perhaps, some people are to be 100% human and 100% divine.

"100% divine" sounds almost blasphemous to some, if humans are to become it. From a biblical perspective, we can say that Jesus was the son of God, and many others can become sons and daughters of God. In MSL, God is essentially who he is, his character, and his character is necessarily what we will have someday, if we are to live in heaven. So while we will not have the life history of God, or the role to perform that he does, we will be like him. In that sense, we will be "100% divine."

What does it mean to be 100% human? Humans decide what they think "human" means. To be 100% human is to accept that very power of defining "human" and what follows from that term. To be human is to be limited by hunger, pain, desire, obsession, memory, in a way that is familiar. To be 100% human probably requires a kind of charisma, and likely correlates with a kind of popularity, and requires relatability.

This version of 100% divine and 100% human is a heavy burden. Some particularly virtuous and sociable people are able to approximate it. Perhaps the great (good) leaders of the mainstream world approach 100% divinity and 100% humanity.

Is it necessary to be 100% divine? To be 100% human? To be both 100% divine and human? I don't know that we all have to be like Jesus. In mainstream Christianity, nobody seems to expect it of us in this life (which is the timeframe discussed in this post). So maybe we don't really have to be 100% divine and 100% human.

How hard should we try to be both? It seems to me like 100% divinity is more important than 100% humanity. But I think the

culture I find myself in, both Christian and non-Christian, seems to think that really being human is of primary importance, and if you can be divine as well, maybe that's a good thing. Our priority is to belong to the human race, and if that is adequately satisfied, then we can think about belonging to God.

If you find the ideal of being 100% human to be a burden, maybe you can set it down. Some people can or perhaps should carry it, and others shouldn't or can't.

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Christology explores the tensions produced by considering Jesus as 100% divine and 100% human. Maybe there could be a branch of anthropology that explores the tensions produced by considering humans to be 100% divine and 100% human, or directionally so.

Focus on God's Suffering

07 December 2024

Sometimes life, in an impersonal way, wakes up the part of you that focuses on your own well-being. Sometimes people instinctively and intentionally do things to inflame your concern for your own well-being.

Focusing on your own well-being is slavery. Sometimes you can consciously sense the slavery. Other times you feel free, but are stuck within boundaries you may not be aware of.

But why focus on yourself? The truth is much bigger than you. God suffers. Why not focus on God's suffering, taking the focus off of you?

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Maybe you need to feel pain, to really sense the reality of it. Maybe by focusing on others' pain, you are trying to be above feeling pain yourself.

How can you understand God's pain if you never feel pain? Maybe the way to empathize with God is to feel your own pain, which is also God's pain because he feels what you feel, to feel it at the same time as him and in solidarity with him.

Human and Divine Needs

07 December 2024

Do humans need humans? In a sense, yes, but if you focus on the statement "I need humans" too much, it can get you to think "I need to be dependent on the humans around me" (like insisting that you drink from the stream nearby since if you don't drink from any stream, you'll die of thirst). If the humans around you aren't reliable, lack vision or are even poisonous in their own right, then you will lose your vision or be poisoned by them. They can lead you away from the truth, even though it may have been out of a principled desire to believe what is true that you emphasized to yourself "I need humans". Additionally, saying "I need humans" emphasizes "I need", your neediness in general; and human neediness, no matter what the object, is heavy, burdensome. Perhaps "I need" not only emphasizes "need", but also "I", an isolating and burdensome word when it is insisted on.

So "I need humans" can be a deceptive truth. What then? There is a lot of freedom in saying "I live to serve others, not to have my needs met". This is a simplistic statement. It's not 100% literally true. But it may be less misleading than "I need humans". There is freedom in taking the focus off of need, and off of dependence on humans. If you get caught up in actually serving others, you don't think about "I" as much. So overall your life is less heavy, for a given amount of external stress.

What about God? What does God need? What are the possibilities? One is that he needs there to be an end to sin. God couldn't bear endless sin. He has a desire for each of us to be saved.

If we can focus on serving others rather than our needs, why can't God focus on serving us (saving us) and not on his needs (that there be an end to sin)? The difference is that God is universal, and we are finite. (The Speaker / Universal Validator is universal.) As finite beings, we are incapable of perceiving every truth. So we focus on what least misleads us. But God (the Universal person) necessarily has to see every truth. So while God can focus on serving us, he also can't help but see his own need in its full heaviness.

It may seem that saying "I live to serve" over "I need" is always

better for humans. But "I need" connects you to "I need there to be an end to sin". Perhaps also within the desire for people to be saved, there is some heaviness and need. Burden-bearing is good, and in this case, "I need" would be connected with something essential. Some needs seem much more compelling than they actually are. The psychological needs for water, food, or sleep can only be ignored at your own peril. This is less true of the psychological needs for social or sexual fulfillment, as obsessively as they may work on you. "I need for there to be an end to sin" is an acquired taste, which gives you part of the heart of God.

If you live among people who say "I need" rather than "I live to serve", for you to say "I need" teaches you what it's like to be them, which may be useful.

Mental Athletics

07 December 2024

I recently finished two years of not reading and writing philosophy. [This was drafted three days after the end of the break, in late October 2024.] But I made exceptions sometimes, yet still abstained more than normal.

Lent lasts six weeks. You can sprint through Lent if you want, like running 100 meters. Gut it out. But if six weeks is 100 meters, six weeks times 16 (1600 meters, a mile) is 96 weeks, about two years. It takes a different kind of mindset to get through two years of abstinence, analogous to the pacing of a mile race versus a 100m race.

Some people might benefit more from one two-year abstinence, as opposed to yearly six-week abstinences.

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One thing I've found as I get back into reading is that my mind is stiff. It doesn't want to focus on philosophy. But if I read more, it warms up.

I wonder if this is caused in part by age. I'm 37, which could be early middle age. Sometimes people turn away from the intellectual with age (and thus turn from the global and the ultimate, since we can only see the global and ultimate noetically). Yet, middle aged people exercise physically, despite their stiffness. Perhaps what is required to be an aletheist when your brain has aged is a commitment to seeking the truth as strong as, or stronger than, what you had when you were young, the discipline to continue thinking big.

Dark Optimism

29 December 2024

In MSL, the "spiritual calculus" says that a bad "position" is not as bad as a bad "velocity" (or "acceleration", "second acceleration", etc.). How disturbed should we be that things are bad? Somewhat. But what is more disturbing is when things aren't getting better, or they can't begin to get better, when things have settled and hardened on a status quo that does not will to become as good as it needs to.

"Dark optimism" is the view that the "position" of us is significantly bad, especially in the world of free will (we do not make the best choices, whether out of bad intentions or not, and could choose to make better ones). If our free will is mismanaged, it makes us bad people to a greater or lesser extent, a dark thing to look at. That's the "dark" part of "dark optimism".

But the "optimistic" part is that, because the world of free will is so bad, it can just change. Truly free will has the potential to either continue doing the right thing, or to cease doing the wrong thing. There is an inherent optimism in seeing people as sinners. Not to see them as sinners in the Augustinian way where they are stuck being sinners, where it is human nature which is corrupt, but to see them in a kind of Pelagian way, where what is corrupt are human choices, at discrete moments and ongoing. The choice to be a sinner is something you inflict on your nature and can always (by definition of what sin really is) choose to withdraw from your nature (though your nature may lag and need something other than your will to bring it in tune with God).

If people can just cease sinning, this should make the world better in temporal ways (at least, in general it would). So this is another part of the optimism.

The very perception that things are dark, and yet free, opens up the way to optimism. Perhaps those who are opposed to seeing things as dark do not believe in freedom, or are committed to a kind of pessimism and/or despair.

If you are really a sinner, as opposed to someone enslaved to sinful habits, you can just stop being a sinner. Becoming aware that you

are a sinner is "dark", but if you focus on how to repent, and just do repent, then that darkness does not have to have a claim on you.

Going to Hell With Good Intentions

29 December 2024

Let's say every year you go on a two week vacation costing $2500. You fly to Bali, Acapulco, Ireland, or some other notable place, and spend money on hotels, sight-seeing, food, entertainment (and perhaps bribes and medical care...). (From easily accessed, possibly rough, estimates of costs I saw online, $2500 is somewhere in the middle of the cost of the three destinations mentioned. Bali was maybe $1800 to $2500 flying from San Diego, the other two were somewhere in the $3000s range.)

If you donate something like $5000 to effective anti-malaria charities, such as Against Malaria Foundation, you will prevent someone from dying from malaria. (GiveWell recently has given lower numbers, but the cost is likely to go up over time, for those reading this in the future.) This person, on average, will be the average age for their country, and on average will live to life expectancy (average age at death) for their country. Perhaps the average age is 30, and life expectancy is 60. Then, this person whose life you would have saved would live an extra 30 years. In these 30 years, they can support their family, otherwise contribute to their nation's economy and social life, and have an extra 30 years to overcome their sins.

If you skip your $2500 vacation, the money you save can be given to AMF, and purchase, in effect, half of a life saved (half of $5000). So, 15 years of life, in the example given above.

Does your two weeks of relaxation, family bonding, and fun compare to 15 years of someone else's life? Maybe you could say that the other 50 weeks of the year, you grind yourself hard, and you couldn't continue without a vacation good enough to restore you. If someone tells you to skip your vacation, which you've been waiting for all year, which is only three weeks away, you think "How could I survive without my vacation? There's no way I could skip it, even to enable someone else to live another 15 years". You may not be able to get refunds that close to the travel date, and even if you could, it might be too much to bear.

Arguably, your vacation is necessary for you to keep your job, and your job is where you got the $2500 to spend in the first place. But what is really necessary in a vacation? Currently, you have to have some really exciting and novel sights, sounds, and other sensations to make it worthwhile. That's why you have go to places like Bali, Acapulco, or Ireland. But what if you could derive enough relaxation from time spent not working, spent in your own city, or a nearby one, or a nearby nature preserve? Perhaps mix time in more home-like settings with more "travel-like" ones.

Limiting your budget limits your options a lot, and you could run out of novelty doing this regularly. But it's still a change of pace from your job. There are people who can't afford to travel, some of whom have stressful jobs, who manage to keep their jobs. Somehow humans can live without the kind of novelty that comes from trips to far-away places. But it might take time to adjust.

Some of the adjustment comes from retraining your brain, and some from realigning your heart, your values. If you value novelty a lot, it will tend to be something you crave and are emotionally attached to. Maybe after your next vacation, you could plan to try to work on how your mind works so that you are not as emotionally invested in novelty, and your brain doesn't need it as much, that way you can save a lot of money on the following vacation, and donate the difference to helping someone live as many as 15 more years. Perhaps you can become used to the idea of someone living longer, and understand how that is valuable, so that that becomes emotionally rewarding.

(Perhaps part of the desire to travel is the fear that you will never get to see some place you have begun to be attached to just by hearing about it or seeing pictures of it. Are you afraid that you won't make it to heaven, where you will get to see it as often as you need to?)

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Are you a good person or a bad person? Some people have bad intentions and don't care that they do. While they might have redeeming qualities that make them somewhat valuable or appealing, the fact that they have bad intentions and don't care clearly marks them as people that God can't have with him in eternity, unless they repent.

Other people think that they are basically good people, but their consciences bother them over something that they continue to be. They may believe that they are not in the right, but they try to suppress that thought rather than do the right thing (or become the right kind of person). If you know that you're not right and you try to suppress that knowledge, you might feel like you are a basically good person sometimes. But having suppressed your conscience, you are knowingly-enough being bad. So it is also clear that God can't have you with him in eternity, unless you repent.

Generally speaking, God values 15 years of someone's life more than another person's two week vacation. You can have a clean conscience and with no conscious bad intentions go on your $2500 annual vacation, particularly if you've never thought about the question before, and passed over the many hints that the world is a place of poverty that you can help with, not willfully ignoring, but simply not being aware of them. But your values will not be the same as God's. If they were, you would have been searching out for ways to help the people who get malaria, or people like them. You will not have God's heart, and you will not be giving yourself completely to what's right (to him). So similarly, God can't have you with him in eternity, unless you repent.

If you are someone with purely good intentions, but you have not developed the heart of God, at the end of the Millennium, God will ask you whether you really want to be with him, at the expense of all your sins. If your heart still loves sins, it's like the situation when someone told you about the Against Malaria Foundation three weeks before your $2500 vacation. You may not have time to change your values so that they are those of God. But if your heart does not love sins, it's the situation where you work on your brain and heart over the course of a year so that a vacation spent at home, or some place inexpensive if home isn't good enough, did become possible as a way to restore your ability to keep working your job. Then you already want what God wants and it's easy to say yes to him, in all he really is.

With a heroic effort, you might be able to not go on your vacation, only three weeks away, expected all year. And so some people may be able to say yes to God anyway, at the end of the Millennium, without complete preparation. But it is safer, and less stressful in the end, to prepare in the long years of this life and in the Millennium.

Saving the World is Grandiose and Routine

29 December 2024

If someone says something like "I want to save the world", that might sound grandiose. Maybe they want to "come up with a way to cure bacterial diseases". Some cultural messages they might hear: "It's crazy to think you could do that. What a big thing it would be if you did it. What a big person you would be." "Think of all the people who die from bacterial diseases. Haven't people been wanting to do something about that for years? Why do you think you're different?" "Do you think you're special? Are you trying to be better than other people? Aren't you a fool for trying this?"

On the other hand, saving the world is a big thing made up of many little, personal stories. With antibiotics, your parents didn't have to die young of tuberculosis. If you have a bacterial infection, you might even be angry at your doctor for not prescribing you antibiotics. You're expecting the doctor to save the world, on the scale of you.

2024 to 2025

31 December 2024

2024

Most of this year, I was taking a break from philosophy. Except, that I did write the MSL booklet. Then, in October, I went back to doing philosophy. I spent the last three months of the year getting back into philosophy.

I also worked on music, writing two albums (not things to release soon, I think) and releasing a demo of another.

I had a computer crash that made me have to restore backups and make new ones. I may have lost some data. I looked through and released old material.

Overall, I felt a feeling of fatigue through much of this year. In the past, when I was depressed, I had more energy. This year, relatively more fatigue. I was tempted to give up writing more often. Toward the end of the year, less fatigue.

I also found my local social life more compelling than in the past (as it had been curtailed by the pandemic).

One interest I had in 2024 (which I think began in 2023) was in the Reformed church. And also in Christian denominations in general. Another was Indonesia, continued from 2022. By the end of the year, all of these largely set aside for now.

I started this blog in July. Possibly about as active as *Formulalessness* was in its first year.

2025

Looking ahead to next year, I think I will probably work on this blog. I don't feel as much of a connection to music as of now, but I find myself still making backing tracks. I don't have have any book-writing projects that I see myself working on in 2025.